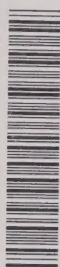


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Government of Canada
Response to reflecting
Interdependence: Disability
Parliament, Government and
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Government of Canada Response

To

Reflecting Interdependence:
Disability, Parliament, Government
and the Community,
**the Sixth Report of the Standing Committee on
Human Resources Development
and the Status of Persons with Disabilities**

November 1999



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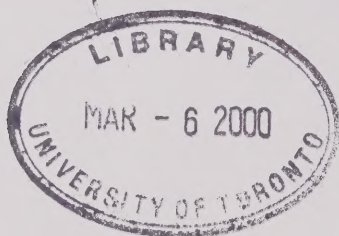
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Government of Canada Response to the Sixth Report of the
Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and
the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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**Government of Canada Response
to the Sixth Report
of the Standing Committee on
Human Resources Development
and the Status of Persons with Disabilities:
Reflecting Interdependence:
Disability, Parliament, Government and the Community**

1. Introduction

The Sixth Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, Reflecting Interdependence: Disability, Parliament, Government and the Community, reflected the hearings and work of the Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities of that Standing Committee. It demonstrated the commitment of many Members of Parliament to ensure that Canada achieves results on disability issues.

In its deliberations, the Sub-Committee recognized that numerous reports and studies have looked at disability issues and have highlighted the barriers that people with disabilities face in participating fully in Canadian life. It focused its work on processes that the Government of Canada uses in connection with disability issues, and on the role that Parliament and Parliamentarians can play in disability issues. The Report makes nine specific recommendations to which this document offers responses based on the overall Government of Canada approach to disability issues.

That approach is based on:

- a commitment to help bring about the full participation of people with disabilities in Canadian life;
- a determination to engage all sectors of Canadian society in action on disability issues;
- a fully shared sense of accountability across and within all sectors based on the reality of collective responsibility for action; and
- work towards clear outcomes, linked to significant priorities.

The first part of this response elaborates on the Government of Canada's vision and approach to moving forward on disability issues. The second part responds to the specific recommendations of the Report and in doing so, demonstrates what this approach means in action.

A Canadian Vision: Building an Inclusive Society

The Government of Canada has a vision of an inclusive society, one in which all Canadians have the opportunity to participate fully and enjoy the benefits and responsibilities of citizenship. The 1999 Speech from the Throne clearly sets out the Government of Canada's commitment to work with "other governments, the private and voluntary sectors, and all citizens to build communities in which Canadians with disabilities are fully included".

The government recognizes that many people with disabilities are not participating fully in Canadian life. In 1991, 44% of adults with disabilities (age 15-64) were not part of the labour force. Even with the same level of education, persons with disabilities are 20% less likely to be employed than people without a disability. Persons with

disabilities, particularly women and Aboriginal people, are concentrated at the bottom end of the income scale.

Even so, Canada has made progress in ensuring that people with disabilities can participate more fully in the lives of their communities. Canada was awarded the Franklin Delano Roosevelt International Disability Award in 1998 in recognition of the progress that it has made to date. When Prime Minister Chrétien accepted that award on behalf of Canada, he pointed out that it would encourage Canadians to do still more to realize the vision of inclusion and full participation.

2. Key Elements in the Government's Approach to Disability Issues

This response offers the government an opportunity to indicate the process and principles it will use as it takes action, both independently and in collaboration with its partners in Canadian life, that will make a difference in the lives of Canadians with disabilities.

The Basis for Progress – Recognizing Our Solid Foundation

The Government of Canada believes that Canada has built a solid foundation for further action towards the vision of inclusion and full citizenship for persons with disabilities.

The Legislative Framework at the Government of Canada Level

Canadians can count on a significant legislative framework that reflects our shared commitment to equality and inclusion. At the federal level, this includes The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Human Rights Act, and the Employment Equity Act. Many provincial and territorial governments have complementary frameworks.

The federal framework continues to evolve in response to experience with results to date and contemporary thinking on disability issues. In 1998, Parliament amended the Canadian Human Rights Act to strengthen the protection of persons with disabilities. The Act now requires employers, including federal departments and agencies, federally-regulated private businesses, and service providers to accommodate the needs of individuals. The only exceptions are cases of undue hardship to employers or service providers. The Canadian Human Rights Act and the role of the Canadian Human Rights Commission are being reviewed to identify ways in which the human rights system may be made more effective in resolving allegations of discrimination.

The Government of Canada has also used its regulatory powers to address disability issues in other ways. Regulations led to improved access to national transportation systems. The government has made strides on accessible communications. The current government has strengthened legal protections through amendments to the Criminal Code and the Canada Evidence Act.

Programs and Services

Each year, the Government of Canada spends approximately \$7 billion on disability-related programs, services and initiatives. Other levels of government make similar kinds of investments, as do the voluntary and private sectors. Increasingly, these investments involve and support partnerships and collaborative measures to address disability priorities.

The Government of Canada and other partners in society have taken significant actions to remove barriers. The current government has introduced tax measures to better recognize the costs associated with disability. It has improved access to skills and employment through steps such as the Opportunities Fund, the Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities initiative and Special Opportunity Grants. Under the Canada Pension Plan Disability program, it is exploring ways to assist clients who are able to return to work.

The Basis for Progress – Shared Commitment

A basic element in pursuing continued progress on disability issues is to appreciate that action on disability issues has to come through the engagement of all sectors of society. Inclusion has to be a shared vision that reaches across Canadian society, achieving a strong consensus on the priorities for action and a tangible definition of the outcomes that Canadians want to see.

This collaborative approach to engagement continues the important role of government leadership on disability issues. It links that leadership to the understanding that the actions taken by one partner in society can complement the actions that flow from the

commitment of others. This reflects the reality that no one sector or group can realize the vision of full participation by itself; they can get the greatest outcomes by working together.

This makes particular sense in the Canadian context. All levels of government have important legal and policy responsibilities in this area. They have unique investments in programs and services for Canadians with disabilities. People and institutions in the private and voluntary sectors also have the opportunity to take action on disability issues, as so many have demonstrated. The disability community itself has a fundamentally important role in helping to promote more change in the attitudes of Canadians. It can play a central role in identifying the solutions and priorities that will be most effective for all partners to take.

The Basis for Progress – Collaboration among Governments

The needs of persons with disabilities are diverse, as are the issues facing them. A complex and complicated system of supports and services has emerged at all levels of government. Consistent with the sense of shared commitment, governments have recognized the need for a more collaborative approach. This is a core element for progress on disability issues.

At the June 1996 First Ministers' Meeting, the Prime Minister, Premiers and Territorial Government Leaders identified the needs of persons with disabilities as a collective priority in their common social policy agenda. First Ministers at their meeting in December 1997 confirmed this commitment. As a first step toward realizing this commitment, federal, provincial and territorial Ministers

responsible for Social Services released In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability Issues, in October 1998.

In Unison represents a shared vision and a policy framework. It is consistent with the Social Union Framework Agreement that was signed in February 1999 providing shared principles and approaches to advance social policies for all Canadians. Both In Unison and the Social Union Framework Agreement indicate the value of government action to remove barriers and promote the inclusion and full participation of all persons with disabilities in Canadian society.

The Basis for Progress – Identifying Outcomes and Priorities

Another emerging element for continued progress on disability issues is the important role of outcome measures and priorities. To have their greatest value, the concepts of inclusion and full participation for Canadians with disabilities need to be defined as clearly as possible. Priorities have to be established and outcomes determined. As with the entire disability agenda, that work needs to reflect as collaborative a process as possible.

That process is underway. In June 1999, representatives of organizations representing Canadians with disabilities presented the Government of Canada with A Work in Progress – A National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities: The Community Definition. This document contains a commitment to work with governments towards achieving the vision of In Unison, and makes several proposals for action.

Building on the significant work done to date both by government and the disability community, the Government of Canada has identified its priority areas for future federal action to address disability issues. The Government's priorities for action reflect the building blocks of disability supports, income and employment identified in In Unison, including:

- helping persons with disabilities find and keep employment and improving their access to disability supports through work in partnership with provinces and territories;
- helping to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal people with disabilities through work with Aboriginal communities;
- reducing injury and disability rates through investments in health promotion and prevention;
- developing an accurate sense of the living and working conditions of people with disabilities by building a comprehensive base of knowledge;
- helping the disability community to increase its capacity to contribute to policy and program development, and to participate in realizing the vision of full citizenship; and
- measuring results and reporting to the public on the effectiveness of Government of Canada programs.

At every step of the way, the Government wants to work with the disability community and all its partners to develop a consensus on the best possible actions available. It wants to develop action plans that enable all partners to move forward together.

3. Response to the Recommendations in “Reflecting Interdependence: Disability, Parliament, Government and the Community”

In Reflecting Interdependence: Disability, Parliament, Government and the Community, the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities accepted the nine recommendations submitted by its Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. The Government of Canada believes that its approach to the disability agenda is consistent with the spirit of those recommendations.

The Government recognizes that there is much to be done on the disability agenda in Canada. It believes ongoing discussion on these issues will be valuable. It looks to the views of Parliamentarians as well as other governments, the disability community, and the broader voluntary and business sector as Canada moves forward on disability issues.

For ease of reference, the Government of Canada has taken the liberty of numbering the recommendations made by the Committee. Each recommendation, and the Government response to it, follows.

Recommendation 1

The federal government should put in place policies and practices that will break down the barriers that separate policy development and program administration of the various departments that deal with disability issues. These new policies and practices should encourage the horizontal management of disability issues across all federal departments and agencies.

Response

The Government agrees that disability issues require horizontal management. Accordingly, improvement of the horizontal management of disability issues, based on the principle of shared responsibility, is a priority in the disability agenda for the Government of Canada.

The Government appreciates that some Members of Parliament, many people with disabilities and other observers have suggested possible new mechanisms to coordinate or manage federal action on disability issues. It is the Government's view that a reinforced commitment to shared responsibility across government is more likely to lead to the degree of engagement on these issues that is needed.

The Government believes that all Ministers, departments and agencies are accountable for action on disability aspects of issues within their own mandate, with the Minister of Human Resources Development Canada taking the lead role on these issues for the Government.

The shared responsibility principle through horizontal management is already at work. That approach was fundamental to the development of the disability agenda for the Government of Canada. More than thirty federal departments and agencies took part in that process. They are committed to following through on the agenda. The next step will be the development of mechanisms to facilitate the development and maintenance of strong interdepartmental linkages. These will improve collaboration among departments and agencies on disability issues.

Some mechanisms to manage horizontal collaboration are valuable and support Ministers, departments and agencies in meeting their responsibilities. To that end, the Government is establishing a steering committee to lead and direct the process of implementing the disability agenda for the Government of Canada. This steering committee will be composed of people at the Assistant Deputy Minister level. It will be chaired by a senior executive of Human Resources Development Canada responsible for coordination of disability issues.

The Department of Human Resources Development Canada will provide a focal point for specific disability-related activities on behalf of the entire government. A particular example will be the development of an accountability framework on disability issues. That work will take place in collaboration with other departments, agencies and the disability community.

The Government commitment to shared responsibility for disability issues reflects the need to manage linkages with other government priorities well. The needs of Aboriginal people with disabilities present a good example of an area where more needs to be done, as the disability agenda recognizes. To address this, discussions are underway at the officials' level to examine, in partnership with Aboriginal people, the processes for responding to Aboriginal disability issues across departments and agencies.

Horizontal management of disability issues extends beyond government. One example is the government support for the Sixth International Congress on Serving Children with Disabilities in the Community, to be held in Edmonton in October 2000. Led by the Canadian Association for Community Living, several departments within the government are working closely with other levels of

government and groups representing community stakeholders to make this Congress a success.

Effective horizontal management will also require gathering key players around the table, including representatives of the disability community, and developing and implementing a collaborative approach to defining issues, identifying knowledge gaps and developing strong and sustainable partnerships.

Recommendation 2

The federal government should put in place a disability lens. This means the federal government should ensure that all legislation, policies, and programs should be designated from the outset to provide access for Canadians with disabilities. Where generic programs cannot fully incorporate the requirements for all persons with disabilities, the government should put in place additional means that provide access for Canadians with disabilities to these generic policies and programs.

Response

The Parliamentary Sub-Committee recommendation on a disability lens echoes the community's call in A Work In Progress - National Strategy for Persons with Disabilities: The Community Definition for an "access and inclusion lens". The Government agrees that implementation of access and inclusion lenses is a useful approach to ensure that there is coherence between policy development and program delivery, and that policies and programs are designed to be accessible to all.

Based on experiences with lenses in other jurisdictions and sectors (such as gender and environment), the Government will develop an approach that will incorporate access and inclusion lenses throughout the policy development and implementation process. This would include use of access and inclusion lenses at specific points in the Cabinet decision-making process and the development of legislation. It would also include tools to help assess the potential impact of new policies or programs on people with disabilities, and initiatives to help increase awareness of disability issues among people in the policy and program management communities.

The Government is already exploring the use of disability lenses with its provincial and territorial counterparts as part of the work on an accountability framework for In Unison. The Government will undertake work on the development and use of access and inclusion lenses within its own activities during 2000-2001. The Government will engage the community in the development of this approach, and seek the views of the Parliamentary Committee and experts.

Consistent with the commitment to shared responsibility, individual departments will be responsible for incorporating the access and inclusion lens into their own program and policy development processes. The Office for Disability Issues in Human Resources Development Canada will work closely with departments to assist in the development and implementation of useful tools. The Office will also be involved in the development, education, and monitoring that will be needed in order to evaluate what works best. The Government recognizes that the use of access and inclusion lenses is a new way of doing things. It means attitudes, approaches, and practices at many levels that may take time to evolve fully. The Government believes that the Standing

Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, or a Sub-Committee of the Standing Committee, may be particularly well-placed to assess the progress that the Government, Ministers, their departments and agencies are making in the use of these lenses.

Recommendation 3

Treasury Board and/or Human Resources Development Canada should prepare a comprehensive annual performance report for federal activities in the area of disability that provides detailed information on outcomes, results commitments and performance indicators for all federal departments and agencies.

Response

The Government of Canada concurs with the Sub-Committee's recommendation for improved reporting to Canadians on disability.

Human Resources Development Canada, in partnership with Treasury Board Secretariat and other departments, will begin work immediately on developing an interdepartmental framework to provide for coordinated reporting to Canadians on the Government's progress on disability issues. The Government-wide framework will include the following elements: outcomes, key result commitments, a performance measurement strategy and a reporting strategy to ensure comprehensive annual Government of Canada reporting on disability. As a first step, the framework will address how annual reporting on disability can be better integrated into existing reporting mechanisms. The process for development of the framework will include consultations and discussions with the Parliamentary Committee and the disability community.

The Government of Canada reporting on disability will also be developed in a way that reflects the key principles of the In Unison framework and is consistent with the Social Union Framework Agreement. The Social Union Framework Agreement signed by First Ministers in February 1999, commits governments to report on the performance of their programs and to develop, over time, comparable indicators to measure progress on agreed objectives. Federal/provincial /territorial governments are currently developing proposals for Social Services Ministers on societal indicators related to persons with disabilities as part of their work to implement the objectives of In Unison. The process of developing indicators as well as appropriate measurement and reporting mechanisms also involves policy discussions between federal/provincial/territorial officials, experts and representatives of the disability and Aboriginal communities.

Overall, these performance reports will help Canadians, including Parliamentarians, assess the country's progress towards ensuring full citizenship for persons with disabilities.

Recommendation 4

Before any decisions about outcomes, or outcome measures are made, Parliamentary committees and the community should be involved in establishing both of these. This is particularly the case for horizontal issues like disability.

Response

The Government agrees that clear outcomes and outcome measures are essential. Those will enable all partners in Canadian life to focus their particular efforts on the access and inclusion priorities where they can have the greatest impact.

The Government agrees that the process of defining outcomes and outcome measures for disability issues has to be as collaborative a process as possible. To that end, the Government is committed to involving the disability community, Parliamentarians and the broader private and voluntary sector in order to move forward.

Some of this work is already underway. The federal, provincial and territorial governments are currently developing proposals for Social Services Ministers on societal indicators related to persons with disabilities as part of their work to implement the objectives of In Unison. Policy discussions were held in September 1999 involving federal, provincial and territorial officials, experts and representatives of the disability and Aboriginal communities. Participants shared their views and began to consider how Canada can effectively move forward on developing appropriate measurement and reporting mechanisms.

The Government of Canada would welcome the contribution of Parliamentarians in the development of performance indicators and outcome measures. For example, the Standing Committee or its Sub-Committee might choose to work with the disability community on these issues. It might develop a standard template that other committees could use in their scrutiny of the actions of all Ministers in regard to disability issues.

Recommendation 5

The federal government should approach the provincial/territorial governments with a proposal for a sectoral agreement in the area of disability under the Social Union Framework Agreement. The federal government's proposal should focus on the provision of disability-related supports and services as a means of eliminating barriers to mobility for Canadians with disabilities.

Response

The Government of Canada is committed to working with provincial and territorial partners to ensure the full inclusion of Canadians with disabilities. Governments share responsibility for fulfilling the commitments in the Social Union Framework Agreement. The Government of Canada has reiterated its commitment in the Speech from the Throne to working with its provincial and territorial partners to eliminate barriers that restrict access to essential services for some citizens, including those with disabilities, because of their province of origin.

The Government of Canada is also working specifically on the issue of portability of disability supports with its provincial and territorial partners, under the joint policy framework of In Unison. The importance that the Government of Canada places on this work, as part of its agenda for full inclusion of persons with disabilities, has also been reinforced in the recent Speech from the Throne. The Government of Canada is exploring with provincial and territorial governments and Aboriginal representatives the possibility of research and demonstration projects designed to improve access to, and portability of, disability supports. As a first step, Human Resources Development Canada has made funds available in 1999-2000 for collective federal-provincial-territorial research in this area. These initiatives will help governments to better understand the concrete issues facing people with disabilities and to identify priorities. Involvement of the disability community will be an integral aspect of this process.

Recommendation 6

Parliament, and in particular the House of Commons, should move quickly to make its building, communications, and practices fully accessible to people with disabilities.

Response

While this recommendation is directed at Parliament and not the government, the Government strongly encourages the House of Commons to consider and respond to this recommendation.

Parliament is an important institution. The commitment that it shows in ensuring that the Parliamentary precinct and processes are accessible and inclusive sends a positive message to all Canadians.

Recommendation 7

The House of Commons should instruct the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to study changes to the Standing Order of the House of Commons that either create a Standing Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities (as existed during the 35th Parliament) or make this Sub-Committee a permanent Sub-Committee of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development, with the current disability-related mandate of that Standing Committee.

Response

The Government recognizes it is the prerogative of the House of Commons to organize the work of its Committees as it decides.

The Government of Canada appreciates and values the work done by the Sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. This response indicates a number of ongoing and valuable ways in which a Parliamentary Committee could monitor and assess the progress towards inclusion and access for Canadians with disabilities.

Recommendation 8

The Minister of Human Resources Development, as lead Minister on disability issues, should create a consolidated responsibility centre for disability issues within the Department. This responsibility centre should have a clear mandate, authority and resources to act in both the policy and program areas. It should be headed by a senior executive who reports directly to the Minister of Human Resources Development.

Response

The Government believes that disability needs to be integrated into the agendas of all departments and agencies. Within Human Resources Development Canada, this is particularly important, given its many major policies, programs and services with significant disability implications.

To ensure an effective degree of coordination and implementation related to disability issues across the entire federal government including Human Resources Development Canada, the Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Human Resources Investment Branch has been assigned the lead responsibility for coordination on disability and to promote action on the government's agenda on disability. She will be supported by the Office for Disability Issues.

The Office for Disability Issues is responsible for the corporate management of disability for the federal government. The Office is mandated to manage the implementation of the disability agenda, expand innovative partnerships, and promote a better understanding of disability issues both within government and beyond. It will coordinate the Assistant Deputy Minister steering committee as well as various interdepartmental working groups. It will foster engagement with the disability community and other sectors of society in order to ensure that the disability agenda moves forward.

The Government is committed to a new approach to disability issues. The emphasis will not be on creating new government machinery, but on ensuring that all departments and agencies have the tools to integrate disability into their agendas. The access and inclusion lenses will help them do this. Better measurement and reporting on progress on disability is also critical. Engagement with the disability community, clients and citizens will help build consensus on where action is required.

Recommendation 9

The recommendations of this report should be reflected in whatever federal disability strategy is proposed or put forward by the government.

Response

Future Directions to Address Disability Issues for the Government of Canada: Working Together for Full Citizenship, which was released on July 8, 1999, outlined the policy directions for the government's agenda on disability issues. It underlined the

individual and collective responsibility of all Ministers for action within their mandates, as well as the shared responsibility of all sectors of Canadian society for action.

The work of the Sub-Committee helped to inform the process that led to development of the government's agenda on disability. The Government believes that kind of engagement by Parliamentarians should continue. As noted elsewhere in this response, Parliamentary committees can play an important role in shaping and assessing the disability agenda. They can help to engage the disability community in defining outcomes and measures that will help Canada move more effectively toward an environment of access and inclusion for Canadians with disabilities.

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